WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2013 Vol. 34 No. 1

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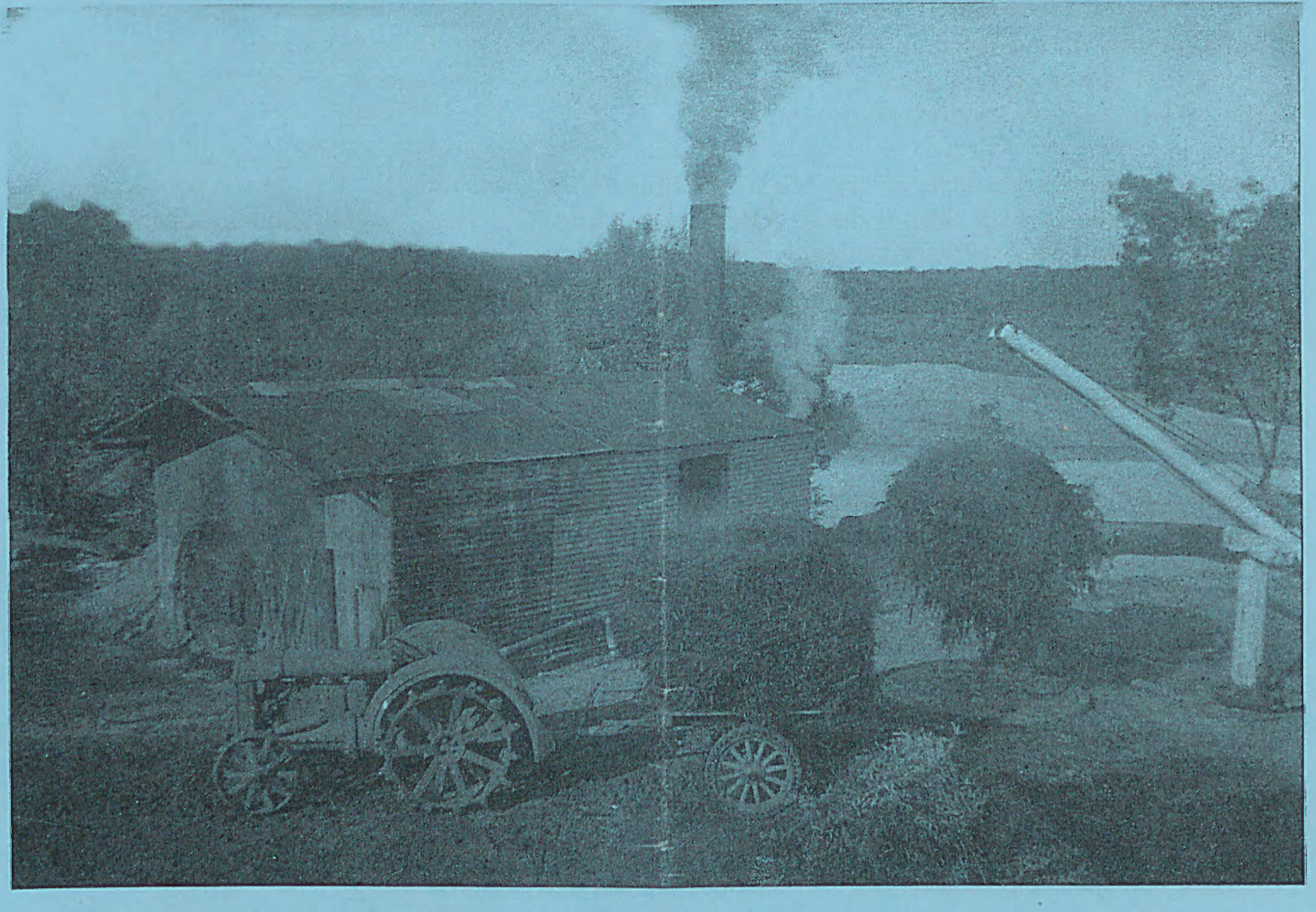

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552. Web address: www.BendigoFNC.com.au
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Office Bearers for 2012 - 2013

President	Jan Orr	5443 5668
Vice President	Richard Goonan	
Secretary/Public Officer	Stuart Fraser	5443 1326
Minute Secretary	*position vacant*	
Treasurer	Ben Goonan	
Membership Officer	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
Excursion organiser	John Lindner/Joy Clusker	5448 3406 (after 15/12)
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	*to be confirmed*	
Garden Convenor/Secretary	*position vacant*	
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Whirrakee contact/editor	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797
Co-editor	Gemma Candy	
Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Vanessa Richardson	
Website coordinator/Webmaster	Ben Goonan	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 34, No. 1, January/February 2013

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short notices		3
The elusive Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo	Rob Watkins	3
Colour Photo section	various wonderful photographers	4-7
October Observation addendum	Rob Watkins	8
A note about alpine leek orchids	Rod Orr	8
The story of Ruedin's eucalyptus distillery	Noel Ruedin	8

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
What a great edition of Whirrakee *to start the year! It has a bit of everything in it, so please keep up such good quality contributions! We are continuing with the eucalyptus distillery theme, this time a historical account from Noel Ruedin, but also have plenty of interesting glimpses at other plants and animals.*
Looking at the two general meetings for February and March, I want to thank Ben Goonan already for organising the speakers for this year, and I am very curious and excited what else he has planned. Please help make these speakers' trips to Bendigo (sometimes from a long way away) worthwhile, by turning up to the general meetings, rain, shine or hail. It could be anything…with the extraordinary weather we are having, the notion of 'normal' weather might soon be obsolete, leaving us merely seasonal and yearly average, that are not a very reliable guide as to temperature and rainfall in any one place and time.

Front page photographer: Leon Ruedin.
This photo of the working eucy distillery in the north-eastern Whipstick was taken in the 1940s. See more photos on page 4 and the story on page 8. You might be surprised to find out what the eucalyptus oil was used for during the war…

Short Notices

For all lovers of fungi…

Fungi play an integral role in ecosystems, yet little is known about them. Fungimap is a national non-profit organisation committed to the conservation of Australia's macrofungi. **Our seventh biennial conference is being held in Rawson, Victoria, in May 24-27.** Fungimap 7 is suitable for people with all levels of knowledge about fungi – from the absolute beginner to the mycologist.

Fungimap 7 includes one day of talks, two days of forays and workshops, and a full day foray to Tarra-Bulga national park. Workshops range from understanding, identifying and surveying fungi and making records, photos, and collections of them, as well as leading fungal activities and assessing them for threatened species status. Talks cover a range of topics, including managing bushland for fungi, mushroom classification, fungi's relationships with orchids and mammals, and Fungimap's work. A small number of student scholarships will be made available. For more information and to register for the conference (registration opens Feb 4), please see the Fungimap website www.rbg.vic.gov.au/fungimap or contact Blanche Higgins Fungimap Coordinator, Mondays and Tuesdays 03 92522374, e-mail: blanche.higgins@rbg.vic.gov.au

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Natural Newstead

Just before Christmas, I came across Geoff Park's 'guide-to-happiness' (and subsequently joined his blog for a terrific treat of local observations and exquisite photographs. Most of you will know it already, but for those that don't, it gives a fantastic view of nature in this region.

http://geoffpark.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/a-guide-to-happiness/

For anybody interested in the debate about the Leadbeater's Possum, here is an article by David Lindenmayer and numerous responses!

http://theconversation.edu.au/sending-leadbeaters-possum-down-the-road-to-extinction-11249

The elusive Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo

by Rob Watkins

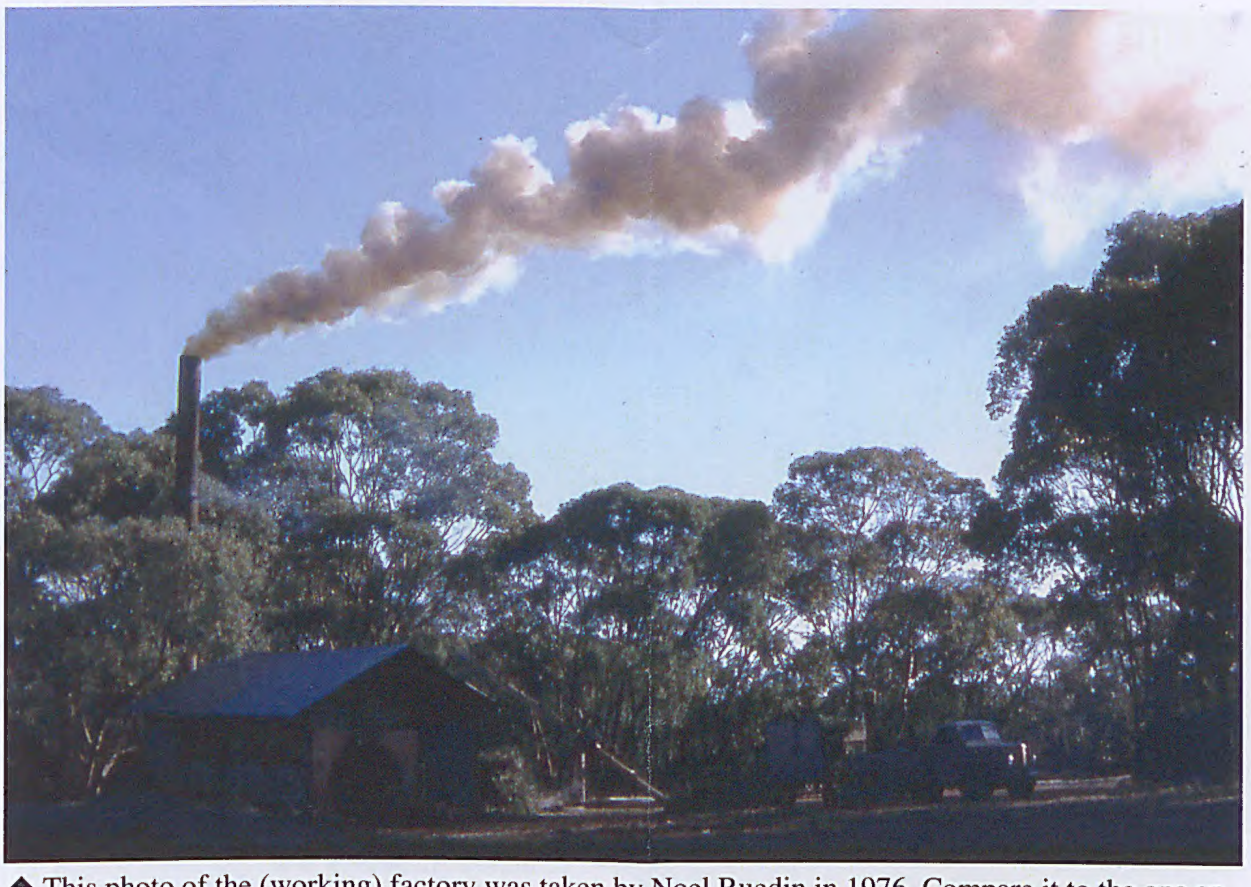
After days of walking rainforest tracks at Malanda in 2011 without sighting the elusive Lumholtz's Tree Kangaroo, (*Dendrolagus lumholtzi*) we returned to the Atherton Table Lands in May 2012 with renewed determination to seek out this remarkable arboreal kangaroo. Pointing a lens upward in a forest where rain is an all too constant companion is one problem, but finding the animal to begin with can be even more frustrating. We were given valuable advice by a local expert: "Look for leaves falling down" he advised. "They are messy eaters and lose a lot of leaves as they bite them off branches." Another clue that at first seemed a joke, "look for the long dangling tail."

After a few days applying these clues and using ideas we developed ourselves, sightings began to materialise. Tracks through dense rainforest were abandoned and efforts instead concentrated outside the forest but looking back into the margins where light could penetrate. Neck muscles also appreciated this technique! And there were occasions when amongst dense still foliage, a moving tail did give the first indication of an animal's position above. Not a joke after all! Not so though one day when a new comer to the region saw us looking upwards at a steep angle and asked "what were we looking at? "tree kangaroos" we informed him". "They must of course be koalas" he said "because kangaroos do not climb trees".

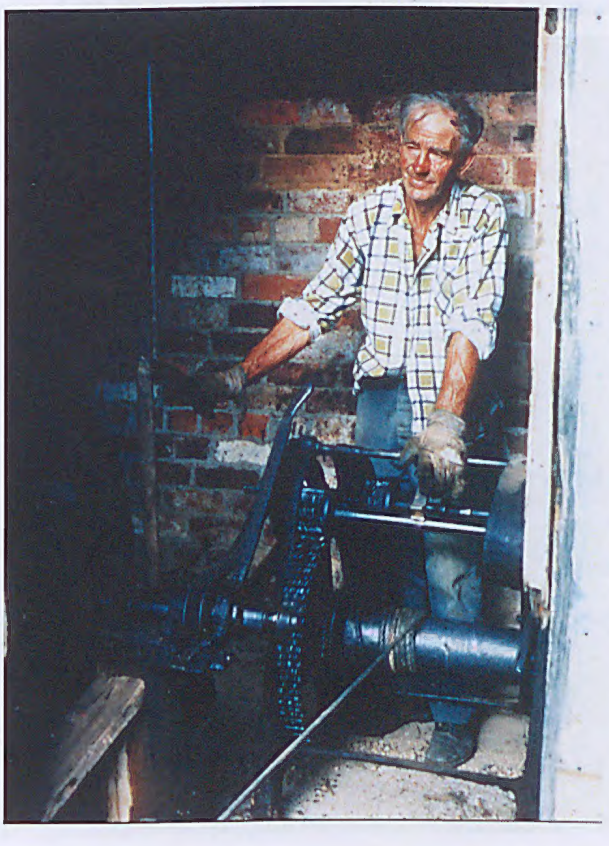
They not only climb to tender leaves in the top of the canopy but unlike other kangaroos, have the ability to walk along branches moving each leg independently, but hop in the normal manner with both legs in unison when moving on the ground. Descending trees was usually done tail first by a tree hugging method, but on one occasion an animal made spectacular viewing by abseilling down a vine with remarkable speed. Vines were often used when climbing.

Continued on page 8…

Eucalyptus distillery in action... (see article on page 8)



↑ This photo of the (working) factory was taken by Noel Ruedin in 1976. Compare it to the one on the front cover from the 1940s



← Leon, Noel's father, working the steam winch, which allowed the crane to raise the spent, leaves from the vat (photographer: Rob Watkins)

And from somewhere quite different...This exquisite lichen is *Thamnolia vermicularis*, the Alpine Thamnolia Lichen, which occurs only at altitudes above 1650 metres.

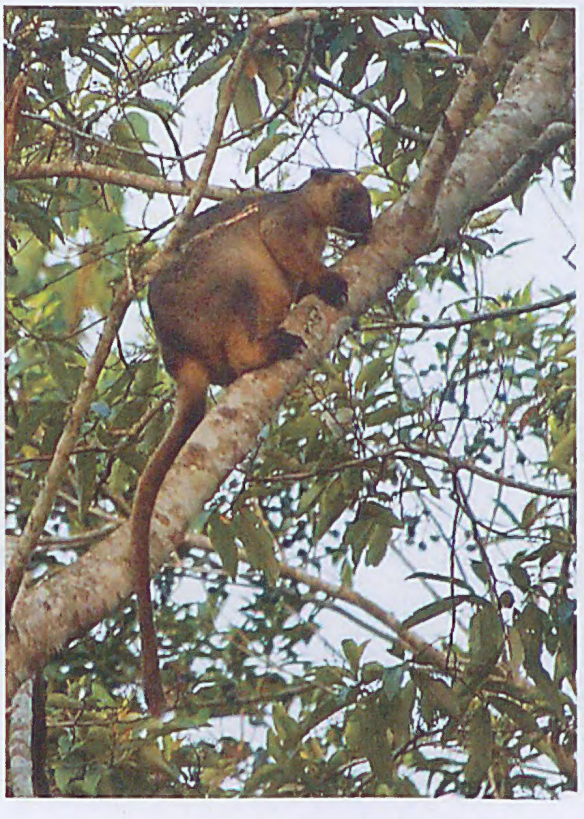
Photo by Rod Orr

Tree Kangaroos at Malanda (see story on page 3 and 8)

This fantastic image of these unusual animals was taken by Cynthia Watkins ↑

Young animal feeding ↓ (photo: Rob Watkins)

Note the rounded ears and flexible tail (R.W.)



December observations from Dale and Peter Little's garden... by Dale Little

Going outside late at night, I noticed a lump on the ceiling of our back veranda. Closer inspection, with a torch, revealed a wasp/hornet building a nest. It continued to build, while Peter and I watched for a short while.

The next morning, the insect was still busy building the nest. Each time Peter approached the nest to photograph, it backed away. I really wonder how nature photographers get that "perfect shot".
Would anyone know who the builder is?

The beetle was found on our back lawn. We are not sure of the species but thought it looked very colourful. It seemed to spend quite a lot of time upside down and was as brightly coloured on the underside as on the top.
Ed's note: ➔
What a stunning beetle. In my book 'Australian Beetles' there is a very very similar one (on a Sweet Bursaria plant) under the name of Eupoecila australasiae *(a scarab beetle).*

A bird in disguise...

← Jan and Rod had to do a double take to recognize this immature Nankeen Kestrel during intensive preening. Langford's Gap, Falls Creek Photo by Rod Orr

Summer-flowering orchids from the High Country

Photographs by Rod Orr

Veined Sun Orchid, *Thelymitra cyanea* ↑

Sutton's Leek Orchid, *Prasophyllum suttonii* →

← Subalpine Leek Orchid, *Prasophyllum sphacelatum* (see note on page 8)

Prasophyllum tadgellianum ↓

...continued from page 3.
On several occasions, after a mother and a three quarter grown young had been feeding in different parts of the same tree, they deliberately came together to apparently enjoy some bonding before going their separate ways again. Images were gained on these occasions of head rubbing and grooming.
Although classified as nocturnal, the Lumholtz Tree Kangaroos moved freely about during the day, but punctuated their activity with frequent short sleeps. Possibly a low nutritional value of leaves might be responsible for the need for frequent feeding.
Clearly, the huge tail, which is longer than the animal's body, although not prehensile, provides effective balance when stretching its reach to the limit. In such situations the tail can be held full length horizontally as stiff as a poker, or allowed to swing freely like a piece of rope when the animal is relaxed.
We came away from friendly Malanda with many images, but clearly the most memorable aspect was seeing these confident agile creatures walking along branches in the rainforest canopy and jumping metres from tree to tree. We certainly recommend that visitors to this region should allocate sufficient time to enjoy the delights provided by these fascinating creatures. Trees bordering the Tree Kangaroo Cafe, adjacent Malanda Falls and Malanda Caravan Park proved for us to be good areas for sightings. When searching for sightings of Tree Kangaroos, patience really is a necessary virtue.

October Observation Addendum
At the October meeting Rob Watkins reported a half grown Mallee Fowl apparently found on the roadside in the Kingower area. Further investigation revealed the bird was actually found beside the road outside the Tarnagulla cemetery. The bird was reported to Wendy Murphy a former Wedderburn-based ranger with DSE, who was satisfied that an accurate identification had been established by capable persons. When speaking with Wendy Murphy today (9th December), she advised that two additional sightings of an adult Mallee Fowl in the same vicinity had been made by different individuals (by Rob Watkins)

A note from Rod Orr about the alpine leek orchids...
What used to be known as *Prasophyllum alpinum*, the Alpine Leek Orchid, has been reinterpreted as either the Subalpine Leek Orchid (*Prasophyllum sphacelatum*) or Tadgell's Leek orchid (*Prasophyllum tadgellianum*) - the greenish ones of the 'Alpine Leek Orchids' are *Prasophyllum sphacelatum* and the bronze-striped specimens of what were all formerly Alpine Leek Orchids are now referred to as *Prasophyllum tadgellianum*. What fun!

The Veined Sun Orchid was still being referred to by the Nature Photographers as *Thelymitra venosa* but, when I checked in Vic-List, it was *Thelymitra cyanea*.

You can't afford to lose concentration for an instant can you?

The story of Ruedin's eucalyptus distillery

Author: Noel Ruedin

Introduction (John Lindner)
Earlier this year I spent some time and effort, with Alan Spence and my sister Kate, searching for the big mallee fowl mound near Ruedin's distillery in the north-eastern Whipstick. An account of that search appeared in the August edition of *Whirrakee.*

Out of the blue, I asked Noel Ruedin if he could provide me with some historical details about the site. He was very forthcoming and sent the following account. On our excursion to the site on Saturday 17 November, he was able to provide many more interesting details.

Noel's Account
After the first war (The Great War) there were soldier settlement blocks opened up in the Mallee, with what appeared to be resounding success at the time. My grandfather Aime Ruedin heard about the land that could be applied for, and as he knew of the Whipstick mallee, thought that this would be a great

opportunity to get some viable farming land. At the time the Ruedins had a farm at Huntly and their livelihood had been with orchards and vineyards. However phylloxera had put an end to their wine business, so times were tough. Aime had been a member of the Boer war forces but had not seen active duty, so I am not sure if that is what qualified him for soldier settlement property - probably any citizen could apply for freehold land. Anyway he applied and acquired property in the Parish of Whirrakee in his name, and also in the name of his wife Olivea Ruedin. It was Olivea's 450 acre property that I inherited.

Aimie had great plans for growing crops, but after a failed attempt at clearing with a steam traction engine, decided that the land was not the fertile land that he had heard of in the real Mallee of north-west Victoria. He realized the only real option was to distill eucalyptus oil. So on this basis, I can only guess that the distillery was started in the 1920's. My father was born in 1910 and helped build the distillery, although he did say that what his father built was very crude and probably only produced a small output in the early years. A basic cabin was built near the current house - all that is left of it is a pile of rounded stones that was the chimney.

It wasn't until the second world war that a major change occurred. My father volunteered to serve in the RAAF, but was instructed to increase the output of the eucy plant to provide valuable oil which was being used to treat our forces who had contracted malaria in the Pacific theatre of war. Eucalyptus oil was the best medicine that we had at the time to treat this ailment.

So during the 1940's, my father rebuilt the factory, having purchased a new boiler, which had been used at one of the Moon mines near Eaglehawk. He also built a new house. He and his brother Sam Hardy carried out the work and put in two new in-ground steaming vats, a new boiler house, a steam-powered winding engine and a crane. They also built a new roller, made from a local tree trunk: I am pretty sure it was a Yellow Box. To make it cylindrical, Leon made up a lathe in the back yard at Huntly and turned the trunk until it was perfectly cylindrical.
This roller can still be seen at the distillery, and whilst the supporting beams have rotted, the actual roller is in excellent condition.

He also purchased a McCormick Deering 15-30 tractor, fitted it with steel wheels and proceeded to roll down large areas of virgin blue and green mallee. After the summer heat had dried the branches and leaves, it was set alight, wind direction being taken into account. This type of activity was common in the Whipstick at the time and accounted for some areas being burnt out unintentionally. The intense heat left only ashes and a few charcoal sticks. I witnessed this, as in the 1970's when I worked the factory with my father, we cleared a few areas that had become overgrown.

Within eighteen months the land was covered in mallee suckers up to two metres high, which carried high levels of oil. This bush was then hand-cut with tomahawks and stacked in rows ready for distilling. One man could cut one vat of leaves in a week, more or less, depending on his ability. My father took pride in his property and insisted that the cutters use tomahawks and cut the bush right to the ground. The alternative practice of hooking, used mainly when the bush was burnt without having been rolled first, left the main stems in place, but resulted in the bush looking dirty and unsightly.

During the war years the main source of labour was from unemployed men, who in some cases were conscientious objectors, wanting to hide out the war. One of the stories told was about an ex-bank manager who had turned to alcohol for whatever reason. He would work for weeks, and after being paid for the oil that it produced would go into Bendigo. Days later he would return and say to my father "Never again, Leon", only to repeat the same binge drinking episode some weeks later. My father woke up to this in time and held back some of his earnings so that he wouldn't drink it all.

There were many stories about the characters who found work as eucy cutters. They found the peace and quiet of the Whipstick offered an escape from whatever were their demons. My father and mother lived at the house during the week and would go home to Huntly at weekends, returning the following week with supplies for the cutters. The main room in the house was the kitchen, and it was my mother's role to provide healthy and nutritious meals to the hungry cutters, of which I am sure they were very appreciative, given that food rationing was in existence at the time.

When the war came to an end, most of the cutters went their separate ways. In my father's case, only one cutter, Ernie Hall, stayed for the long haul. Ernie cut bush until the early 1960's. He would cut all year, coming to Huntly and getting his supplies each week. He originally had a British Velocette motorcycle, but I remember him riding an old black bicycle with canvas pockets for carrying goods. My father and his brother Sam would go to the factory and process his leaves once a year in winter, and it would take a number of weeks to do this. Eventually Ernie retired to a rental house owned by my mother in Huntly, until many years later he moved to the Brotherhood of St Lawrence in Eaglehawk. When Ernie stopped cutting leaves, the factory ceased operation in about 1962.

Some years later a neighbouring eucy factory, belonging to Burnsides at Kamarooka East, burnt down. The crew that were working the factory approached my father and asked if they could lease his plant. The operators were Eddie Plowright and his brother Jim. My father agreed and spent some time getting the factory ready to be used again. The Plowrights ran the plant for a number of years in the early 1970's and, as well as bringing leaves from their own leases, also reopened the Ruedin blocks again. The eucy oil business was never a very profitable one and Eddie and Jim eventually moved on. They were also quite elderly and Jim's health had deteriorated.

About 1976, my father shut down his main source of income in Huntly, producing eggs from poultry. This was due to the introduction of the quota system in which the regulation of the industry created an environment for commercial operators to get bigger, but in which smaller family businesses could not survive. Leon decided to restart the eucy factory with my help. We purchased a forage harvester and trailer from a university friend of mine at Carlsruhe, and we "whipstickised" the unit based on experience gained from the Plowrights. Forage harvesters were never designed for the harsh conditions of cutting branches in a rocky environment, so substantial strengthening of the unit was required.

The business once again ran with two operators, my father and I. With the machinery, we could cut and process 2 vats a day, whereas before it took one cutter a week to cut enough for one vat. However there was not enough bush to make it a full-time business and my father was not going to roll down semi-productive country just to produce oil - he was after all a naturalist. The oil was sold to Fauldings in Adelaide, and although it was not highly profitable, it did provide an income to supplement the small mixed farming business that he still ran in Huntly.

I started full-time work as an engineer in 1976 and my father continued to operate the factory by himself for a number of months until finally shutting it down in 1977. In 1986 after the death of my father, the land with the eucy factory passed to my brothers and shortly after was sold to the Forests Commission. I still own the land left to me by my Grandmother Olivea (Crown Allotments 9 and 14). It is now protected under a covenanting agreement with Trust for Nature.

Please see the next edition of the Whirrakee *for the conclusion, some snippets about Noel's father and some thoughts about the time by John Lindner.*

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

The first general meeting for 2013 is on
Wednesday February 13 7.30pm
The speaker is Eddie Tsyrlin, Aquatic Ecologist, The Waterbug Company, and his title is: 'Freshwater macroinvertebrates and their use as indicators of river health'

Wednesday March 13 7.30pm
Dr. Rohan Clarke, Lecturer, School of Biological Sciences, Monash University, will talk about 'Tropical birds, pathogens & the joys of fieldwork in Torres Strait'

Regular Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.

Family Nature Club
The next activity 'Snapping in the bush' will involve Nature Photography at No7 Reservoir Sunday 17 February. This activity is part of the City of Greater Bendigo 'Summer in the Park' program.
Please register if you are turning up with family, or let Jan and Rod know if you intend to offer assistance.
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Positions Vacant
The BFNC is still looking for an enthusiastic member who can take on, or help with responsibilities of the club garden. A minute taker for our general meetings is also still needed.
Please phone Jan Orr with any expressions of interest for both positions.

All welcome to the SEANA Autumn Camp
The Peninsula Field Naturalists Club (www.home.vicnet.au/~penfnc) will host the event from the 15th March to Sunday 17th March 2013.
The accommodation is Merricks Lodge (UCA Camp), 108 guests,
3670 Frankston Flinders Rd, Merricks 3916.
Melways Page 17 Map 192 or Map192 B12.

e-mail address: penfieldnats@gmail.com
postal address:
Ms. Doris Weigert, Peninsula FNC Inc.,
Unit 3, 2 Skinner Street. Hastings Vic 3915.

2013 Connecting Country Education Program. Connecting Country's 2013 Education Program has the theme 'learning from experience & learning from each other'. It is a diverse and interesting program and that is enjoyable, inspiring and, of course, educational. Check it out at:
http://connectingcountry.org.au/12/the-connecting-country-education-program-is-on-again/